



## NJDOE News

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### **Department of Education, Distinguished Guests Honor 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*: Host Roundtable Discussion with Students, Elected Officials and Scholars**

TRENTON — Commissioner of Education William L. Librera today joined a host of distinguished guests and elected officials in leading a student panel discussion and addressing the lasting importance of the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision — a decision that ordered desegregation in schools across the country.

The two-hour commemoration at the War Memorial in Trenton was the first of two Department of Education (DOE) events scheduled to kick-off a year-long commemoration of the *Brown* decision's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The second event, a statewide videoconference, was scheduled for this afternoon with schools participating from across the state.

"What we want to do this morning, this afternoon and for the entire year is not only celebrate this vital decision, but also study, discuss and learn from it so that we can continue not only the good work that has occurred in the last 50 years — but most importantly, continue this into the future," Commissioner Librera said. "What needs to be done involves all of us."

The morning kicked off with addresses from Commissioner Librera, Secretary of State Regena L. Thomas, Assemblyman William D. Payne, longtime DOE official Marcellus Smith, and Dr. Clement Price, the keynote speaker and professor of African American studies at Rutgers University.

"*Brown v. Board of Education* remains the most important Supreme Court decision in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American History," said Price addressing an audience of more than 200 and the student panel of 18. "In the coming year, there will be celebrations, of course. But we must continue to remain sincerely committed to ending desegregation in our society."

The morning program focused on the youth of America in the form of the 18-member student panel. Secretary of State Thomas addressed the high school students directly.

"If you are somewhat confused by all this history, let me break it down for you," Thomas said. "Can you imagine tennis without Venus and Serena (Williams)? They changed the game. Can you imagine golf without Tiger Woods? Can you imagine deleting all these things from your life's experiences today?"

"Can you imagine looking to your left and your right and not seeing your peers?" Thomas said. "Can you imagine education without the 1954 Supreme Court decision? This decision changed America. It changed the idea of what was possible."

The students then engaged in an hour-long panel, spirited discussion — posing both questions to the speakers and answers for themselves.

"Be a leader and go into someone else's group," said Mike Bland, a junior at Long Branch High School. "That group can take you somewhere you never thought you could go. If we all come together, we can form a powerful group."

"As long as you remain open-minded and keep an open heart, I think that's the best our generation can do," said Gol Golshani, a senior at West Windsor-Plainsboro South High School.

"Students need to step up," said Terri Brooks, a senior at Granville Charter High School in Trenton. "Whether they are black, white, Jewish, Italian, or Chinese, we can be accepting of one another's differences and proud of who we are. We may be different, but we're all the same."

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." Most all involved in the panel discussion in the morning agreed that celebrating the decision is a beginning, but that carrying the message and continuing to work to end segregation are vitally important.

The daylong kick-off commemoration includes a 3:30 p.m. interactive videoconference sponsored by the DOE and held at various locations throughout the state. There, DOE officials will lead students in panel discussions about the court decision. This includes an overview of the historic civil rights decision, followed by a question and answer session.

Scheduled to participate in the afternoon event were: the Bergen Academies in Hackensack; Camden High School in Camden; Elizabeth High School in Elizabeth; Central Elementary School in Keyport; Camden Middle School in Newark; and Vetera Memorial Intermediate School in Vineland. The event was hosted at the DOE headquarters in Trenton.

In addition to students from New Jersey schools, a host of dignitaries attended the morning event. They included: Lucille Davy, special counsel for education for Governor James E. McGreevey; Maud Dahme, State Board of Education President, and John Griffith, a State Board Member; Assemblyman Wayne Bryant; and Assemblyman Craig Stanley.

Also in attendance were a host of DOE personnel, as well as Commissioner Devon Brown of the Department of Corrections; and Commissioner Ida L. Castro of the Department of Personnel.

"I'm very pleased to see that there is hope," Marcellus Smith said. "All of us have a role to play in this. All of us have a responsibility."

"Good questions beget good answers," Commissioner Librera said in his closing remarks. "But there is still work to be done. It starts this morning and will continue throughout the year and into the future. With these leaders among us from a younger generation, we are able to celebrate this monumental event and are able to accomplish much, much more."

For more information about the DOE's year-long *Brown v. Board of Education* commemoration, please contact the Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.